

A quiet, simple man was Abel Keene,
He meant no harm, nor did he often mean:
He kept a school of loud rebellious boys,
And growing old, grew nervous with the
noise.

The timid girls, half dreading their design,
Dip the small foot in the retarded brine.

And I was thankful for the moral sight,
That soberised the vast and wild delight.

It is as bad as Wordsworth at his worst.
Yet there is a
great deal more in Crabbe than doggerel.
His poetry and
his life are both alike in this: they seem
monotonous and
dingy. They are. But look closer; mixed
with their
grey texture are threads of deeper and of
brighter colour-
flashes of quiet heroism; sorrows felt
passionately, though
the words are few; and a lifelong loyalty to
truth, some-
times sad, sometimes sardonic. Truthfulness
—that is
Crabbe's master quality, and the secret of
his lasting
appeal. He did not deal in beatific visions:
he trailed no
clouds of glory: he has no claims to be
called 'great'.
But whether it was a dyke of muddy water
in a marsh
or the brooding memories of an old woman
at her cot-
tage door, he had no common power of
sight, and of
insight, and of saying what he saw.

His life, indeed, is very like one of his own
tales. Under
its sober surface lie both grimness and
romance. Already
as he grew into boyhood his quiet home was
darkened by
the sombre rages which began to grow
upon his father,
to the point of throwing the crockery about
the room,
until his wife came to dread the sound of
his returning
footsteps. Strange destinies, too, awaited

the poet's
younger brothers. The third son became
captain of a
slave-ship; one day his black cargo broke
loose, mastered
the vessel, and set their white captors
adrift in an open
boat; Captain Crabbe and his men were
never heard of